

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS,
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH, CHAPEL
(Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No.
20)
5000 West National Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS WI-360-E
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS – NORTHWESTERN BRANCH, CHAPEL (Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Building No. 21)

HABS No. WI-360-E

Location:	Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 5000 West National Avenue, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin
Present Owner:	U.S. Federal Government - Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Present Occupant:	Vacant
Present Use:	Vacant. A lease to the Soldiers Home Foundation is being negotiated. The Foundation would renovate the chapel and use it for services and other gatherings.
Significance:	The Chapel was built in 1889 during a period of expansion for the Northwestern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Originally a chapel for resident veterans was located above the dining hall in the multi-purpose Main Building. Expansion of the membership and a shift away from the centralized model in the 1880s and 1890s resulted in the construction of a number of specialized new buildings, including the chapel. The wood-frame chapel was designed by prominent Milwaukee architect Henry C. Koch using the popular Shingle Style variation of Queen Anne architecture. Koch's firm was the architect for many buildings during this period of expansion including the hospital (1879), Ward Memorial Hall (1881), and the library (1891).
Historian:	Lisa Pfueller Davidson, HABS Historian

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1889
2. Architect: Henry C. Koch & Co.
3. Original owners, occupants, uses: The chapel was used for funeral and religious services attended by Northwestern Branch home members, staff, and guests until the mid-1990s.
4. Builder: John Langenberger [sic] of Milwaukee
5. Original plans and construction: Original drawings have not been located for the chapel. It appears to retain its original Shingle Style appearance on the exterior.
6. Alterations and additions: Commemorative and religious themed stained glass windows were added throughout the chapel between approximately 1915 and 1930 (see the interior window description below for a detailed assessment). Interior partition walls were added to the chaplain's suite at the south side of the sacristy ell sometime after 1936. Extensive restoration work on the interior and repair to the exterior is currently ongoing, through the initiative of the Soldiers Home Foundation.

B. Historical Context:

The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (renamed National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873) was established by an Act of Congress signed by President Lincoln in March 1865. Federal officials recognized the growing need to care for Union soldiers injured during their Civil War service and subsequently unable to support themselves. This unprecedented federal effort paralleled many state and local initiatives to care for disabled soldiers as the wounded filtered back North after years of fighting. The initial legislation did not specify where the Asylums would be located, but the general understanding was that several sites in different parts of the northern states would be needed. The Eastern Branch was opened in Togus, Maine on November 10, 1866 to serve veterans in the Northeast. The first of the original branches, the Togus property was a former health resort that offered a number of buildings for immediate use. The Northwestern Branch in Milwaukee also was established in 1866, after negotiations with the Wisconsin Soldiers' Home Society transferred the money and property already acquired by that group to the federal effort. The Central Branch was located outside of

Dayton, Ohio in 1867 to be accessible to a large number of veterans in the lower Midwest, western New York and Pennsylvania, and states to the south. By 1930 when the National Homes were incorporated into the new Veterans Administration, the system had grown to include veterans of multiple conflicts cared for at eleven campuses located around the country.¹ Many of the historic National Home sites are still part of the vast system of hospitals and other veterans' benefits managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (the Veterans Administration was converted into a cabinet-level department in 1989).

During its early decades the Board of Managers for the National Home embarked on ambitious building campaigns for the Northwestern and Central Branches that erected large-scale institutional structures within carefully designed landscapes. Historian Patrick Kelly draws convincing connections between this embrace of high profile institution building and the political motivations of veteran services. In his assessment the Board of Managers were “highly partisan politicians, advocates of a strong and active central state, and eager, for humanitarian as well as political reasons, to demonstrate the power of the federal government to create a centralized institution for the care of war-disabled veterans.”² Linking care for disabled veterans to domestic ideals of home was an important rhetorical device to gain public support for this endeavor. These efforts culminated in successful lobbying to have the name changed to National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in 1873 (hereafter NHDVS). The Board of Managers was especially careful to disassociate their institution from others with highly negative connotations, such as poorhouses or insane asylums.³

Each Soldiers' Home branch had some sort of chapel - often constructed as part of the early development of the site - that would accommodate religious services for various Christian denominations. At most branches a single building housed separate spaces for Catholic and Protestant worship, while the Central Branch in Dayton, Ohio had separate buildings. During construction of the Main Building in Milwaukee (see HABS No. WI-360-A), the Board of Managers adopted a resolution that a number of amenities be housed in the building, including a chapel which could also be used for lectures and concerts.⁴ Apparently this work was not completed prior to the building dedication in late September 1869. A few days later at the Board of Managers meeting, it was resolved that “the space in the second story, over the Dining Room, at the Northwest Branch Asylum, be converted, by removal of the partition therein, into a Chapel and Concert Hall

¹ Suzanne Julin. “Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers,” Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. National Historic Landmark Registration Form (draft), (2008), 35. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

² Patrick Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 85.

³ Kelly, 91.

⁴ Minutes, 11 December 1868, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers NHDVS, Vol. 1*, (Washington, DC: GPO), 30. Wolcott was the only no vote on this resolution.

and fitted up for use as such.”⁵ An early photograph of this space shows a large open room with rows of chairs facing a stage/altar.⁶

Religious observance and spirituality were encouraged as part of good citizenship, although chapel attendance by members tended to hover below ten percent. The chaplains also visited the sick in the hospitals and officiated at the regularly occurring funerals and interments at nearby cemeteries. The National Cemetery adjacent to the Northwestern Branch was established in 1871. It is interesting that the intent of the first chapel space at the Northwestern Branch was to provide multipurpose meeting space as much as an opportunity for religious observance. As the branch developed and many functions moved to specialized buildings, the need for a dedicated chapel structure became more apparent and perhaps integral to the appearance of respectability sought by the Soldiers’ Home leadership. Ecclesiastical structures built by the Federal government were, and are, fairly unusual, with chapels like those at the NHDVS branches and on active military installations providing the most common exceptions.

By the late 1870s, the Northwestern Branch began to shift to a decentralized arrangement like the Central Branch in Ohio. When testifying before a Congressional committee in 1884, General Sharpe, the current governor of the Northwestern Branch, expressed dissatisfaction with the large main building. He attributed most of the discipline problems to “herding” the men together in one large structure. The governor speculated that if he had enough money, he would prefer to tear the building down and start over on a decentralized barracks plan like the Central Branch.⁷ In 1879 a new hospital was built west of the Main Building. This structure was a major step toward creating the cluster of buildings that define the historic core of the campus and was indicative of the shift in focus to medical care of aging veterans.⁸

Rather than slowing as originally expected, the demand for the National Homes continued to grow as the Civil War veterans aged and Congress broadened admission requirements. In 1884 there was a major expansion of the eligibility for the NHDVS branches. Previously proof had to be provided that one’s disability was a direct result of military service. Now any honorably discharged Union veteran was eligible for admission, as well as veterans of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. As previously self-sufficient veterans became disabled due to various causes, including the long term effects of their military service or simply old age, the demand for Soldiers’ Home admission grew rapidly.⁹

⁵ Minutes, 1 October 1869, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers NHDVS, Vol. 1*, (Washington, DC: GPO), 43. For a complete description of the dedication of the Main Building see “The Dedication Yesterday,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 September 1869, 1.

⁶ Postcard, “Interior of the Home Chapel,” c. 1875, Zablocki VA Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI.

⁷ Quoted in Kelly, 114.

⁸ Board of Managers – NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1880), 111.

⁹ Kelly, 128; Judith Gladys Cetina, “A History of the Veterans’ Homes in the United States, 1811-1930,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1977), 171, 167. Disabled veterans of the Mexican

Henry C. Koch, Architect

Starting with the new hospital in 1879, the firm of Milwaukee architect Henry C. Koch (1841-1910) was repeatedly hired to design the new buildings at the Northwestern Branch. In 1881 Koch designed Ward Memorial Hall, which greatly expanded the recreational facilities for the branch by adding an auditorium and restaurant space. Construction of Ward Memorial Hall also removed the theater and concert functions from the chapel on the second floor of the Main Building. Koch later received the commission to design the new chapel in April 1889. According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, “H.C. Koch & Co. have just completed barracks costing \$25,000 and are building a \$10,000 addition to the dining room at the Soldiers’ home. . . they have contracts for a frame chapel at the Soldiers’ home, 40x90 feet, \$8,000.”¹⁰

Born in Hanover, Germany in 1841, Koch came to the United States as an infant. His German background linked him to the large population of German businessmen and entrepreneurs who were coming to power in Milwaukee during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He was educated in Milwaukee schools and learned architecture through an apprenticeship with George W. Mygatt beginning in 1856. Mygatt was Milwaukee’s most important early architect, having started his practice in the 1840s. He designed numerous churches, stores, hotels, and residences as well as performing the duties of contractor and real estate investor. This range of projects and roles was an excellent learning experience for the young Koch. Along with Edward Townsend Mix, architect for the Main Building at the Northwestern Branch, Henry C. Koch was one of Milwaukee’s most noted and prolific architects.¹¹ In May 1886, Koch wrote to *Inland Architect* that although there were approximately eighteen practicing architects in Milwaukee “Messrs. E.T. Mix & Co., and ourselves, have done fully three fifths of the entire amount of architecture work in the city.”¹² By the 1880s, Mix’s career was starting to wane and Koch was in his most productive period.

For the Soldiers’ Home commissions, Koch had the advantage of being a veteran himself. He enlisted in the Wisconsin infantry in August 1862 and served as a topographical engineer under General Phil Sheridan from October 1862 until the end of the war. Then he continued to serve as a civilian employee on Sheridan’s staff for the occupation of Louisiana. Upon return to Milwaukee in early 1866, Koch formed a partnership with Mygatt. In 1870 he established his own practice. Koch was also a charter member of Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Post No. 1, which was named

War and War of 1812 were first eligible in 1871, but there was some confusion regarding how to interpret the law requiring proof of service-related disability.

¹⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 April 1889.

¹¹ Joseph Korom, *Milwaukee Architecture: A Guide to Notable Buildings* (Madison, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 1995), xi-xii. The most complete study of Koch’s career is William P. O’Brien, *Milwaukee Architect: Henry C. Koch*. MA Thesis: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1989. Unless otherwise noted, information in the next three paragraphs comes from this work.

¹² “Milwaukee, Wis.,” *Inland Architect and News Record* (May 1886): 71.

after early Soldiers' Home advocate E. B. Wolcott. A biographical profile appearing in an 1890 GAR publication listed "the Soldier's Home" first among his prominent public building designs in Milwaukee.¹³

Koch excelled at securing government commissions, successfully winning contracts for courthouses, schools, hospitals, orphanages, asylums, and government agencies throughout the Midwest.¹⁴ Koch is best known locally for the German Renaissance Revival Milwaukee City Hall, built 1893-1895 and still in use.¹⁵ Unlike the conspicuous German identity displayed in the design of City Hall, built at the zenith of German immigrant influence in Milwaukee politics, business and culture, the Soldiers' Home structures designed by Koch and Co. exhibit an assortment of eclectic Victorian architectural modes.

Koch's work also exhibits a typical Victorian tendency to embrace new materials and building technology. In his thesis on Koch, William O'Brien wrote:

Koch is an important exemplar of his profession in a particular time and place. In his buildings, popular stylistic elements were synthesized and efficient plans and mechanical improvements adapted, yielding handsome and sturdy buildings satisfactory to a broad range of clients.¹⁶

The fanciful Shingle Style chapel with its asymmetrical profile and oversized corner tower richly textured with decorative shingles was a stylistic departure from his previous buildings on the site. In both its decorative mode and use of wood, the chapel had more in common with residential structures – particularly the nearby Surgeon's House (built 1887) - than the various masonry institutional buildings designed by Koch. Koch also demonstrated proficiency in masonry Gothic Revival church design such as his early Calvary Presbyterian Church (1870) and Il Gesu Catholic Church (1892-93), both in Milwaukee.

Constructing the Chapel

In addition to designing the chapel, Koch's firm served as superintendent of construction. Builder John Langenberger [sic.] of Milwaukee entered into a contract for construction of the chapel on April 13, 1889. Signed by Northwestern Branch officials and Koch, the contract awarded \$7834.70 to Langenberger for construction, with a

¹³ "Henry C. Koch," in *Soldiers' and Citizens' Album of Biographical Record*. (Chicago: Grand Army Publishing Company, 1890), 810-811.

¹⁴ O'Brien, 23.

¹⁵ Milwaukee City Hall was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2005. See Quinn Evans, Architects. "Milwaukee City Hall," Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. National Historic Landmark Registration Form, 2004. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶ O'Brien, 62.

completion deadline of August 13th.¹⁷ That summer the Board of Managers reported that once the chapel was complete, there would be room for 60 more beds in the Main Building. The Protestant chaplain assigned to the Home expressed more spiritual hopes for the new chapel:

The new chapel, now being erected, besides adding a new and attractive feature to the grounds of the Home, will, it is to be hoped, because of its central location, be the means of increasing the attendance upon the religious services.¹⁸

The chapel opened for use on September 22, 1889. In 1890 the Board of Managers reported that both the Protestant and the Catholic chaplain held services in the new chapel several times a week. German language services were held semi-monthly by visiting ministers from Milwaukee. Other denominations and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union also used the chapel periodically. The final cost of construction was \$9,317.85, which came from the "post fund." Post fund monies were generated by Home store sales of tobacco, toiletries and other incidentals, as well as on unclaimed member benefits. Generally the post fund was used to support recreational activities and services for the Branch members.¹⁹

In 1896 money was appropriated and contributed to install a pipe organ in the chapel. Students from Marquette College did a benefit performance at Ward Memorial Hall to help raise money for the cause.²⁰ Guidebooks and souvenir photographs from the late 1890s and early 1900s indicate that the original finishes on the chapel were darker and polychromatic. In the black and white views, it appears that the shingle siding is brown, with a dark contrasting color on the trim. The tall corner tower and various gables, turrets, and bracketed hoods give the façade a lively irregularity typical of Victorian Queen Anne buildings. Descriptions provide some additional details regarding the features and use of the chapel:

Clergymen of both Protestant and Catholic denominations hold service here several times a week. . . . This building is lighted by electricity and heated by steam. It contains a pipe organ, and has a magnificent bell – the gift of kind friends in and about the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Flowers for the altar come from the green-house on the grounds. Sabbath School is held every Saturday for the children living in the neighborhood of the home, a picnic annually; and a Christmas tree every year to make the children happy – most of the presents being purchased with money

¹⁷ Contract for chapel, (13 April 1889), in historical collection of Zablocki VA Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁸ Board of Managers – NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1889), 102. The Board of Managers comment regarding more beds in the Main Building appears on page 90.

¹⁹ Board of Managers – NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1890), 88.

²⁰ Board of Managers – NHDVS, *Annual Report*, (1896), 92.

contributed by members of the Home. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union hold services in the chapel every Thursday at 2 pm.²¹

Some of the other home branches, such as the Southern Branch in Hampton, Virginia, created separate interior spaces within a single building specifically dedicated for Protestant, Catholic and, in this case, Jewish services. This approach was a common alternative to the separate Catholic and Protestant chapel buildings for the large population of the Central Branch in Dayton, Ohio. The use of the Northwestern Branch chapel seems to have been more flexible, with a small sacristy wing behind the altar divided equally into rooms for the Catholic and Episcopalian chaplains. Each side has its own entrance through opposite sides of the altar, with a Catholic tabernacle in the north room. Otherwise, it appears that the main worship space was used interchangeably by various denominations.

Changes and Later Use

In 1902 the chapel, and a number of officers' quarters were reshingled and repaired. A quarters for the Episcopalian chaplain was built nearby the same year.²² Other reports from this period estimate attendance at religious services at between 6.5 and 15.2 percent of the membership.²³ As recalled by Elizabeth Corbett in her memoir of her childhood at the Northwestern Branch, the chapel was never overcrowded. Most of the officers and their families attended the Episcopalian service at 11 o'clock Sunday morning in the brown-shingled chapel.²⁴ The Governor and the Treasurer [Corbett's father] sat in pews facing the choir off to the right side of the nave (north transept). The other officers had private pews on the right side of the nave while the members sat on the left. According to Corbett, National Home procedure in this period automatically listed any member who was not Catholic as Protestant. The organist was one of the Branch engineer's three daughters, while another sang in the choir.

During the early twentieth century, the growing population of Spanish American War and then World War I veterans utilized the chapel at the Northwestern Branch. Reports from the 1910s indicate a number of routine repairs for the chapel such as fixing the roof and requests for painting.²⁵ A photograph in the 1916 guidebook shows the

²¹ Richard W. Corbett, ed. *The Soldiers' Home: Detailed Description of the North-Western Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, 7th ed. (Milwaukee: Burdick, Armitage, and Allen, Printer, c. 1895), 5-6. The first line of the chapel section states: "A handsome chapel, which will seat 600 persons, has been built at a cost of \$9,000."

²² Inspector General, *Annual Report of Inspection - National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*. Washington, DC: GPO, (1902), n.p..

²³ Inspector General, *Annual Report of Inspection - NHDVS* (1905), 41; Inspector General, *Annual Report of Inspection - NHDVS* (1907), 26.

²⁴ Elizabeth Frances Corbett, *Out at the Soldiers' Home: A Memory Book* (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1941, reprinted in 2008 by Acta Publications and the West Side Soldiers Aid Society), 93-94.

²⁵ Board of Managers *Annual Report* (1915), 41; Inspector General, *Annual Report of Inspection - NHDVS* (1919), 22.

stained glass windows behind the altar in place, but the original clear diamond pane glazing still intact at the south side aisle. Drawings from 1936 indicate that all of the original clear diamond pane glazing was replaced by commemorative polychromatic art glass windows by this time.²⁶ Two of these windows in the north transept are inscribed “Donated by the American War Mothers of Wisconsin.” The other commemorative windows appear to be part of a contemporaneous post-World War I effort.²⁷

In spite of significant doctrinal differences between the primary denominations using the chapel, it appears to have continued to be used in a flexible fashion by both Roman Catholic and Episcopalian officiants. A 1924 guidebook for the Northwestern Branch offers a revealing description of how the Catholic and Protestant clergy divided the interior space:

The chapel is handsomely furnished with all the paraphernalia of the Catholic service in a special chancel and a separate altar and other appointments for the Protestant worshippers. It has a seating capacity of 400 people and is well attended at all services.²⁸

The Catholic chancel refers to the tabernacle and cabinetry built into the adjoining sacristy room at the north front of the nave. It is not clear where the separate altar referred to in this quote was located.

Around 1928, members of Congress began advocating for restructuring federal veterans services. Three different agencies served veterans – the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the Pension Bureau, and the Veterans’ Bureau (founded in 1921 and primarily involved with medical care and insurance). Various restructurings were considered; the most straightforward and ultimately successful proposal combined all three agencies under a new Veterans’ Administration. This proposal was approved by Congress on July 3, 1930 and instituted through an executive order. The NHDVS Board of Managers resisted the initial proposals, but finally their eleven branches were folded into the new VA. The NHDVS was no longer an autonomous agency; now their primarily domiciliary services were just one of many offered by the Veterans’ Administration.²⁹ The former Northwestern Branch became known as the Wood, Wisconsin station of the Veterans’ Administration and the chapel was designated Building No. 12. After World War II, the chapel continued its important role in hosting religious services and funerals for veterans, particular those being interred at the nearby national cemetery. The chapel continued to be used for this purpose until circa 1990.

²⁶ “First Floor Plan – Chapel Building, Wood, WI,” (March 1936), Veterans Administration drawing accessed on PLIARS system at VA DC Headquarters.

²⁷ On the War Mothers of America, see *History of Milwaukee City and County, Volume III* (Chicago, Milwaukee: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 367-370. Accessed via Google Books by Mark Schara.

²⁸ Tom L. Johnson, *Souvenir History – Northwestern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers* (Milwaukee, WI, 1924), 47.

²⁹ Cetina, 382-383.

Since then the chapel has fallen into disrepair, although it retains numerous original features. As of this writing the non-profit Soldiers' Home Foundation is negotiating a long term lease with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The hope is that the Foundation can restore the chapel and make it available to veterans and the general public for funerals, memorial services, and other ceremonies such as weddings. The Soldiers Home Foundation also plans to coordinate with the Milwaukee County Veterans Services' (MCVS) staff to use an office space in the chapel as a referral center for homeless veterans and those needing counseling services. To date, the lead and asbestos abatement has been completed, as well as a historic structure report and architectural restoration plans.³⁰

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The chapel is a wood frame, one story Shingle Style building with a high cross gable roof and tall corner tower. The structure is sheathed with decorative wood shingles cut in a variety of patterns, as was characteristic of the Shingle Style of Victorian-era design. The original earth tone color scheme would have been consistent with contemporary fashion.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair. Repairs to the steeple are underway and additional work is necessary to make the chapel water tight.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The chapel is 101 feet, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, and sixty-six feet, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide at the transept. The structure has a Latin cross footprint with the altar at the west end of the sanctuary. Various porches and stoops create an irregular outer edge. The tall corner steeple tower is over twice as high as the ridgeline for the sanctuary.
2. Foundations: The chapel has a low Cream City (yellow) brick exterior foundation and appears to almost rest on the ground in areas of the site where the grade level slopes up slightly. A series of wood pilings supported on brick piers is located in the crawl space below the floor.
3. Walls: The wood walls are adorned with a variety of sheathing and recesses that give the building a lively visual texture even though the entire exterior is currently painted white. The east façade near the steeple and entrances is the most highly ornamented. The front gable here is decorated with variegated bands of fish scale or coursed shingles and dentils along the cornice. The rest of this façade also features bands of decorative fish scale, coursed or saw tooth shingles, and clapboards. The wall recesses slightly at

³⁰ For information on the Soldiers Home Foundation's chapel restoration efforts see www.soldiershome.org

the top of the windows; this niche is accented by an additional cornice with dentils. The shingle motif continues on the side elevations with a larger proportion of clapboard. The west façade is the plainest, but it also has bands of decorative shingles in the large gable with thin clapboards below. There is an applied cornice molding with dentils at the transition between shingle and clapboard. The low gambrel roof ell at this elevation is also sheathed with clapboards and bands of decorative shingles.

4. Structural system, framing: The gable roof is supported by a series of wood scissor trusses pinned to structural piers in the nave. The structural trusses were hidden by a plaster ceiling and braced below by large brackets creating a decorative arch at each bay of the nave going from east to west.

5. Porches: The chapel has a small front gable entrance porch on the north façade accessed via two small wood steps. This porch continues a step down across this façade to the side of the transept under a shed roof extension. A similar low shed roof porch fills the space between the tower and the transept on the south façade. Both porches have an oversized decorative bracket at each end of the eaves; these brackets have a ruffled scroll saw profile and decorative circular perforations at the center. The porch posts are plain with chamfered corners. Each porch has low, plain balustrades and horizontal bracing members between the posts.

There is a low stoop with a front gable hood supported by sawn decorative brackets at the south side of the corner tower. The pediment of the gable is filled with raised wood molding in a basket weave pattern. There also are low stoops accessed via a short flight of wood stairs on the south and north elevations at the west side of the transept. Each stair has a simple wood hand rail and balustrade. Each stoop is sheltered by a shed roof hood extending from the eaves and supported by oversized decorative brackets matching those on the porches.

6. Chimneys: None

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The chapel has several exterior doors to facilitate the flow of worshippers in and out of the sanctuary and to allow direct access to the private spaces for clergy near the altar. The public doorways are all accessed via the porches on the north and south façades. At the east end of the chapel there are four wide openings – two at the front gable entrance porches and two perpendicular to these facing west to the side porches. Two additional openings are located at the transept at the west end of the side porches. Each of these openings has a shallow reveal framed with simple molding and two leaf wood panel doors. Each door has a four recessed horizontal panels in addition to a larger uppermost section containing a fixed sash filled with stained glass. The stained glass pattern consists of squares of gold colored glass surrounded by thinner rectangles of green and darker gold.

Two narrower openings – one on the north and one on the south elevation - allow private access at the west side of the transept. Each of these openings has a shallow reveal framed with simple molding and a single leaf wood panel door. Each doorway shares a shed roof hood with a small window. Each door has a six recessed horizontal panels and a square glazed art glass transom above. All of the doors appear to be early twentieth century replacements, as does the plain metal hardware except for one remaining Victorian deadbolt.

There is a cyclone door for access to the unfinished partial basement at the west end of the main building, south of the sacristy ell.

b. Windows: The typical chapel window is a tall rectangular wood sash opening with a square fixed sash above. The windows have simple molding with shallow sills. These windows appear alone or in pairs or triples separated by wide mullions. The stained-glass in the chapel windows appears to date from at least four different periods. Originally the sash contained clear and yellow translucent glazing in a diamond pattern. Seven of these double hung windows survive at the rear sacristy areas of the building. The design of these windows is very similar to that of those in the Ward Memorial Hall, also designed by Koch and built eight years earlier.

On the west façade behind the altar there is a grouping of three larger rectangular windows that were installed by 1916, as evidenced by a photograph in a guidebook of that date. Traditional in design, and overtly Catholic in imagery, they portray, from left to right, the Virgin Mary, Christ the Good Shepherd, and St. John the Evangelist. Each figure is set within an ogee arch and holding or wearing characteristic iconography, such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Crown, and the Cross. The prominent eagle in the St. John window would have provided patriotic connotations as well.

Another generation of art glass replaced many of the original diamond pane windows in the nave during the early 1920s. The art glass is primarily gold, green, and white rectangles, with a more elaborate pattern of three round arches and red rosettes on a purple background in the upper square sash. Twenty-four of these windows bear dedications (“In memory of”) at the bottom. Most notably, two of the windows in the north transept are inscribed “Donated by the American War Mother’s of Wisconsin,” listing 18 of that organization’s chapters. Since the War Mothers of America was a national commemorative group for the relatives of fallen World War I soldiers, it is likely that all the memorial windows were part of an effort by this group. More elaborate groupings of these windows appear in the gable ends of the nave and transept. The east grouping at the front of the nave is a very large opening consisting of five sets of rectangular windows each with three square sashes above. For the sets of triple windows along the side elevations, the center opening is completely fixed while the flanking ones have a hopper opening section at the bottom.

At the gable ends of the transept on the north and south, there are similar, but smaller window grouping of four rectangular windows each with two square sashes above.

The sacristy ell and the flanking areas at the west side of the transept have smaller single rectangular wood sash windows. Three windows with traditional religious themes are located in the sacristies. The window in the north (Catholic) sacristy portrays Christ, crowned, holding the bible, and flanked by instruments of his passion and seven doves. This window is inscribed “Donated by Sacristy Society 1937.” In the south sacristy, one window portrays the Nativity, and another the Resurrection. Although there are no inscriptions of dates on these two windows, they are similar in style to that of the north sacristy. The partial basement below this area has small horizontal two light hopper windows, or fixed glass block replacement. The east and west elevation also each have a diamond shaped opening near the peak of the gable with a fixed wood sash and flat, wide molding. These sashes are filled with stained glass.³¹

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The chapel has a tall cross gable roof with a moderate pitch. It is currently covered with gray composite shingles. In the 1936 drawings the roofing material for the main cross gable roof is labeled as metal shingles, while the tower featured wood shingles
- b. Cornice, eaves: The chapel has closed rake on the east and west gable ends. Along the north and south elevations the eaves are open with exposed rafters. The open eaves have a slight flare with rounded decorative rafter ends and metal gutters. At the gable ends of the transept the exposed rafters ends are covered with a fascia board. Only the lower portion of the wood finial with a carved ball remains at these peaks. Oversized decorative brackets matching those at the porches appear at the corners.
- c. Tower: The tall square tower at the southeast corner is four levels high and topped by a steeply pitched pyramidal roof with a decorative metal finial of inscribed circles and scrolls on an cruciform frame. The ground level serves as an entrance foyer while the second level appears to be connected to the attic level of the chapel by a dormer-like extension through the slope of the roof. It continues the shingle decoration of the rest of the façade with additional flourishes. In addition to variegated bands of fish scale, saw tooth, and coursed wood shingles, the tower is ornamented by a turret projecting from the southeast corner starting from the second level to just above the cornice of the pyramidal tower roof. The turret is topped by an octagonal roof with a modest metal finial.

The tower and its turret also feature a varied fenestration pattern and treatment on each level. The ground level is perforated by doorways at the south and west (via the porch) and a set of three small rectangular windows on the east. At the second level there is a band of tall thin windows that wrap around the tower and turret from east to south. These windows are a smaller variation of the typical window with two rectangular double hung sash below and a single square sash above. The glazing in these windows is translucent clear glass. At the third level the turret is sheathed with shingles and the east, south, and

³¹ HABS Architect Mark Schara contributed extensively to this section of the description.

west façades of the tower each have one typical three part window. Each window has a small bracketed hood at the top that is sheathed with shingles. The fourth level of the tower is the most highly ornamented. Here all four elevations have a three window grouping filled with solid wood panels and louvers with a scalloped lower edge. The center window is higher and features a carved quatrefoil motif at the top and a pyramidal roof dormer with a metal finial. The turret has a very thin and tall round arch opening at each face of its octagonal shape that is filled with wood louvers.

d. Cupola: There is a tall wood cupola, or fleche, above the crossing of the nave and transept. It has four small louvered openings. The wood louvers have a scalloped lower edge. It is topped by a pyramidal roof now covered with composite shingles. The roof has a shallow cornice with dentils and a decorative metal finial. Historic photographs indicate that this cupola may be an early replacement of the original.³²

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The chapel has a partial basement under the west end of the sanctuary which contains a boiler. The first floor has two small entrance vestibules at the east corners, a large unpartitioned space for worship with an altar at the west end, and a choir box/organ area on the south side of the space separated by low wood wall. A pair of originally mirror image two-room suites is located next to and behind the altar. In the 1936 plans the one on the north is labeled “Priest’s Rooms” and the south “Minister’s Rooms.” The north room flanking the altar includes a small toilet room. A door in the west wall, past a triangular closet, leads to a square room within the low sacristy ell at the west elevation. In the south suite of rooms the bathroom has been removed and a partition wall blocks access to the sacristy ell room.

2. Stairways: The chapel does not contain any interior stairways. The second level of the tower is accessed via a very steep enclosed ladder stair at the entrance vestibule level.

3. Flooring: The historic floors in the chapel are wood tongue and groove. Currently some sections of floor have a layer of plywood due to the ongoing renovations. The 1936 drawings indicate linoleum covering over the wood floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The chapel walls are plaster and lath with dark brown wood wainscot around the exterior to a height of approximately four feet. The wainscot has recessed panels and a thick chair rail. A matching low wall forms a curved space for the organ and choir box in the south transept. The outer side of this wall has a raised motif of a pointed arcade while the inner side is simple beadboard. Pilasters with a cluster of three engaged columns appear on the exterior walls between the wainscot and the exposed ceiling beam. The pilasters are painted a gold color with gilt details in the

³² The 1889 souvenir booklet has a photograph of the chapel showing a gabled, dormer-like structure at the crossing. Photographs from c. 1895 and later show the current cupola. Souvenir booklets are in the Zablocki VA Medical Center Library collections.

capital and rest on a wood plinth incorporated into the wainscot. Historic photographs and the 1936 drawings indicate that the walls flanking the altar were originally painted with bands of stylized floral motifs and/or an “imitation travertine” finish. Areas of plaster and lathe between the wood beams remain in the side aisles and vaults, while the plaster has been removed from the main ceiling area as part of the renovations. Sections of the west wall have square acoustic tiles glued over the plaster. The chaplain suites have simple plaster on lathe walls with a tall wood baseboard. The baseboard here has a cluster of horizontal beading running across the center.

The scissor truss roof structure is supported by wood arch braces resting on metal piers in a modified hammer beam configuration. The piers are formed by a cluster of Corinthian pilasters with gilt capitals. The piers stand on matching dark wood plinths. These exposed arch braces are dark stained wood and meet to form a pointed arch at the center of the nave. Secondary pointed arch braces extend between each column along the side aisle. The arch braces all meet at the column and the exposed ends here are all capped with a raised cushion of concentric circles. An additional brace of straight wood beams in a triangle form extends across the side aisle to the sloped ceiling. These side aisle bracing beams are also dark brown, with a diagonal member at the center. The exposed wood beams all have decorative notches near the ends and chamfered edges.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The inside of the main exterior doors feature a wide flat molding and a modern push bar latch. There are additional two leaf openings from the entrance vestibules with similar wide, flat molding. The wood doors are stained dark brown with six horizontal recessed panels. These doors have push plates and pin hinges. The interior doors at the chaplains’ suites have wide beaded molding with bulls-eye corner blocks. The single leaf doors are wood with five recessed panels in a two vertical, one horizontal, two vertical pattern. The brass knobs have a decorative brass escutcheon.

b. Windows: At the interior the windows have a shallow reveal with a wide, flat dark brown molding. The dedication inscriptions on the commemorative stained glass can be read from the inside. The windows in the nave have all been recently refit into metal frames with a layer of plexiglass on the exterior. The hopper portion of the windows have an exterior screen. The sacristy windows do not have screens.

6. Decorative features and trim: The west wall has elaborate wood paneling framing the windows and highlighting the altar with recessed Gothic Revival geometric motifs. The wood is painted a glossy cream and many of the recesses are filled with mirrors or accented with gold. The ensemble is framed with a simple triangular pediment, with an inset Tudor arch at the peak filled with diaper pattern of quatrefoils set within diamonds. A series of foliated recesses within a pointed oval appear vertically around the edges of the paneling. Below the windows a built-in altar is framed by a series of Gothic pediments with mirror insets. The altar frame has a taller pediment and pointed arch form at the center framing with three smaller ones to each side. Small sections of applied relief carving of stylized foliage extend vertically above the pediments. The altar and

central Gothic pediment have engaged Corinthian columns with a faux travertine finish. The altar is raised three steps above the nave on a wide wood platform.³³

The “Priest’s Room” at the north side of the altar has one wall covered by an elaborate built-in wood cabinet containing drawers for storing vestments, linens, and other supplies used during the Catholic Mass. The cabinet is stained dark brown and retains its original hardware. The cabinet features a center section with drawers and tabernacle flanked by tall armoires. The doors feature inset quatrefoils and other Gothic Revival motifs. At the center sits a bronze tabernacle for storing the chalice and communion wine and wafers. The tabernacle doors have the letters “IHS,” a monogram for Jesus Christ based on the Greek alphabet. The tabernacle is framed by an elaborate Gothic pediment topped by carved foliage and a cross. A raised carving of the Sacred Heart appears in the pediment symbolizing the Roman Catholic belief in transfiguration through the Holy Eucharist. Small engaged columns with a Gothic capital flank the tabernacle. A small bronze crucifix is mounted below the tabernacle over the top of the chest of drawers that also serves as an altar. The top of the cabinet has a castellated parapet on either side of the tabernacle. A carved wood dove with rays of sun, or the Holy Spirit, is mounted on the ceiling just in front of the tabernacle. Tall, plain wood cabinets fill the remaining wall space at either side of the three-part Gothic Revival one. These appear to be later additions.

There are small wood cabinets containing hymnals built-in at the transept entrances.

7. Hardware: The doors and windows appear to have historic brass hardware, including door knobs with brass escutcheons, pin hinges, sliding bolts, and hopper window handles and hinges.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating and ventilation: The chapel has cast iron radiators in the walls under each side window behind a decorative metal grille with a quatrefoil pattern. All of the Northwestern Branch buildings were connected to a central steam heating and power plant built in 1895. There is a hot water boiler in the partial basement below the sacristy ell at the west. Ventilation is provided by windows.

b. Lighting: The chapel received electrical service by 1896 and perhaps was lit by gas prior to this time. A historic photograph published in the 1916 guidebook shows multi-armed chandeliers hanging offset from the center aisle of the nave (See Figure 2). A number of pendant ceiling fixtures and matching wall sconces survive that appear to date to the 1920s. These fixtures have opaque white glass shades with delicate gold festoons and tracing and a brass or bronze base with open floral tracery. The pendant lights hang from a chain at the center of each side aisle arch. The sconces each have two sockets mounted on a short metal cross bar. There are exposed incandescent and fluorescent light

³³ Notes in the Zablocki VA Medical Center Library building files indicate that a new altar was purchased for \$350 in 1909. The appearance of this altar is unknown.

bulbs along a decorative frieze framing the altar area. A later flush mounted ceiling fixture with a shiny opaque white closed shade appears in one of the sacristy ell rooms.

c. Plumbing: The priest room flanking the altar to the north has a corner porcelain sink. There c. 1980 handicapped bathroom in this area that replaced the older water closet.

9. Furnishings: The chapel pews have been removed for restoration. The 1897 pipe organ sits within a large dark brown stained wood case installed at the choir box on the south side of the sanctuary. The exposed organ pipes are in the upper level of the casing and there are two small doors at the lower level with a solid section in the middle. This area is ornamented with recessed panels having curved and chamfered edges. A line of horizontal bead and reel molding and several raised carvings of a stylized lyre and foliage demarcate the transition to a three-part cornice and the upper section of the casing. The upper section also has a horizontal bead and reel molding, but is generally an open framework for the organ pipes. The organ received an aeoline in 1908 at a cost of \$366.³⁴ An aeoline is a type of organ stop that has a string sound.

D. Site: The chapel is located on a slight rise near the Wood National Cemetery on the west side of the Soldiers' Home grounds.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: Design drawings for the chapel have not been located. The oldest available extant set of drawings dates to 1936. They are available through the PLIARS system at the VA headquarters in Washington, DC.

B. Early Views: Souvenir booklets in the collection of the Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center Library provide the earliest photographs of the chapel. See *National Soldiers' Home Near Milwaukee*. (New York: The Albertype Co., 1889)for exterior view taken shortly after completion. A 1916 souvenir publication includes an early interior view.

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³⁴ Building Files – No. 12. Chapel, Zablocki VA Medical Center Library, Milwaukee, WI.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Chapel at the Northwestern Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (now Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center) was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS, Catherine Lavoie, Chief) during 2010 as phase two of HABS documentation for the site. HABS is part of the Heritage Documentation Programs (Richard O'Connor, Chief) of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The project is sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Construction and Facilities Management, Kathleen Schamel, Federal Preservation Officer, as part of a multi-year effort to record the significant examples of National Soldiers Home architectural currently under the jurisdiction of that agency. It was made possible through the cooperation Robert H. Beller, Director, Zablocki VA Medical Center and many members of his staff, especially Librarian Jill Zahn. The drawings team was led by HABS architect Mark Schara, working with HABS architects Paul Davidson and Daniel DeSousa and student architect Sara Dewey (University of Maryland). The historical reports were prepared by HABS Historian Lisa P. Davidson. Large-format photography was undertaken by HABS Photographer James Rosenthal.

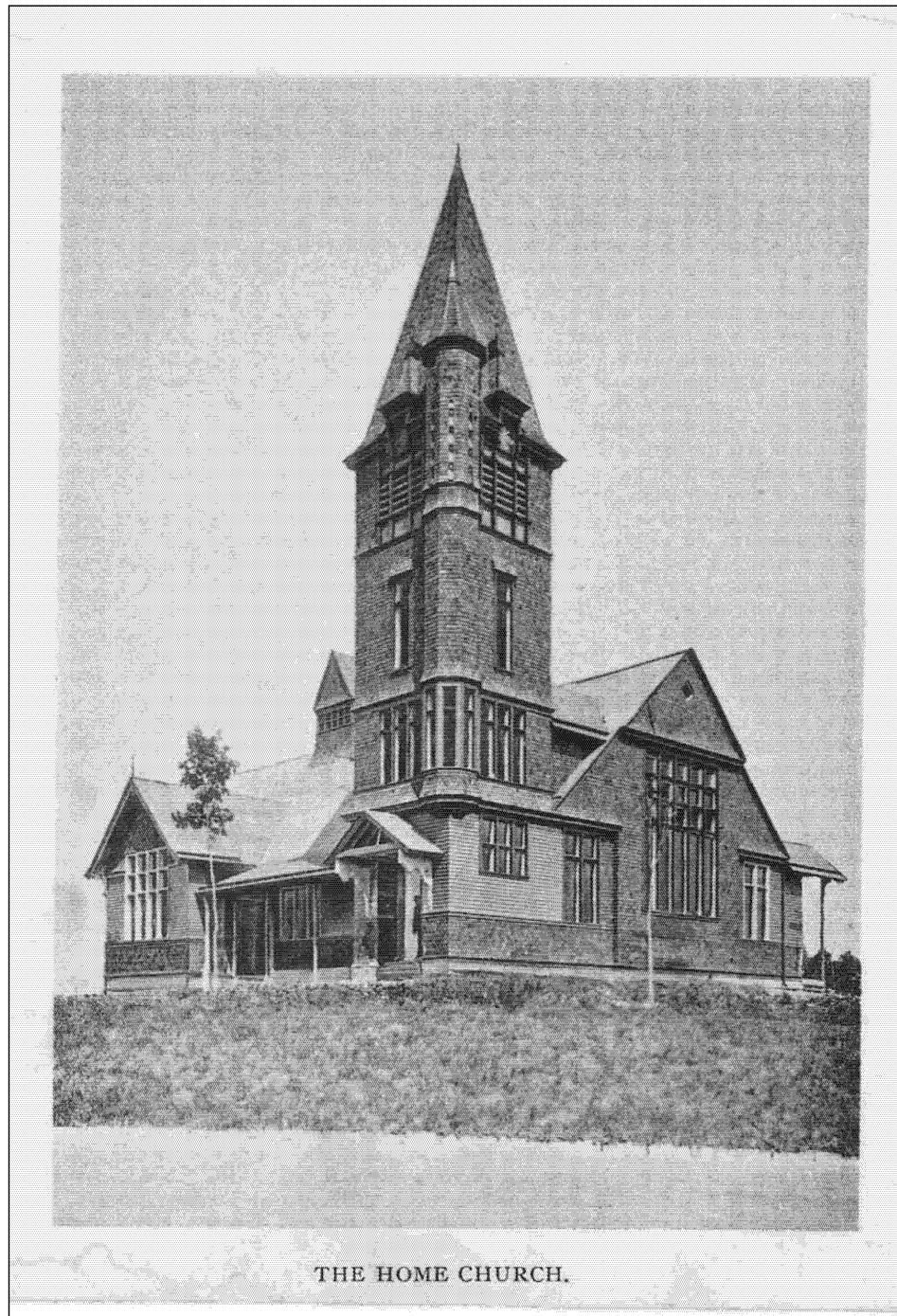


Figure 1 – Chapel, 1889.
Source: Zablocki VA Medical Center Library

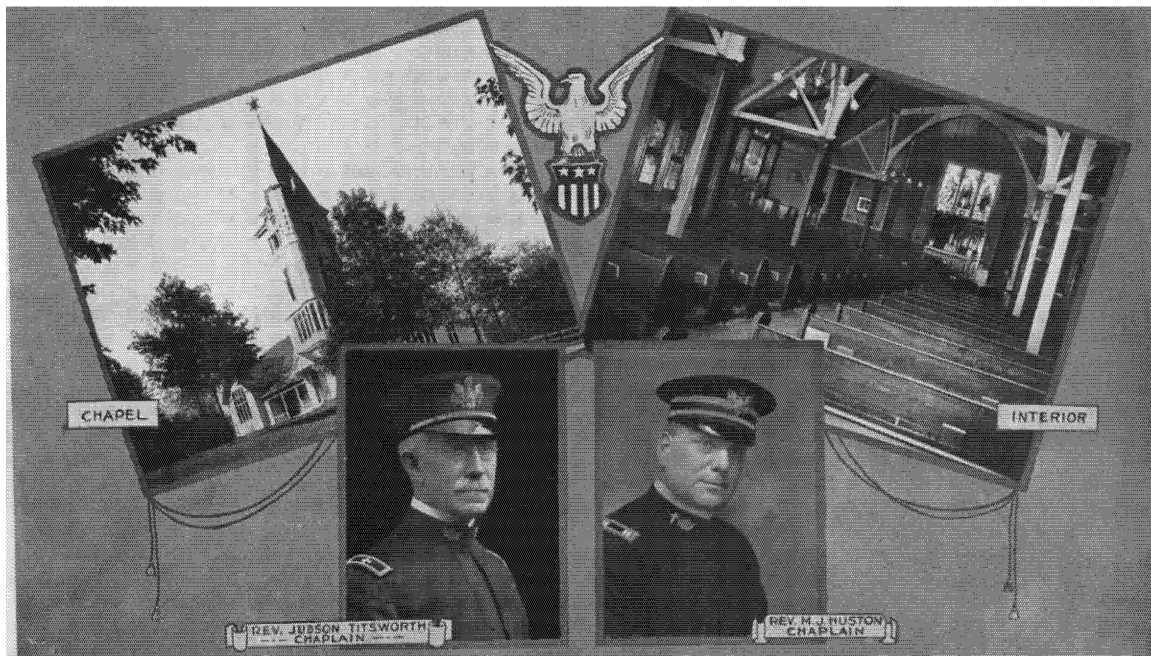


Figure 2 – Chapel, Exterior and Interior, 1916.
Source: Zablocki VA Medical Center Library